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IS VIRAT ONE OF THE GREATEST IN IPL?

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

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Cricket today

Is Virat Kohli one of the greatest in the Indian Premier League? When it comes to batting, he is the best, but in the overall scenario, the veteran is way behind. His association with Royal Challengers Bengaluru started on the tournament's first day. From a rookie to a top star, Kohli has seen everything with the franchise.

Despite his presence, the franchise remains trophyless. I know cricket is a team game; one individual can't change the team's fortunes. However, this argument doesn't give Virat the right to run away from the blunders he committed while leading the team. He was RCB's captain for a long time and has all the say in the retention and selection process.

Despite their below-par performances, he never urged management or owners to stick with players. The list of RCB discards is endless. Most of them have become match-winners for other teams. Yuzvendra Chahal was their best spinner. He was humiliated by the management, including Virat, by not retaining him, and the spinner went to Rajasthan Royals.

KL Rahul played for them. Shivam Dube was with the Bengaluru-based franchise. Travis Head and Heinrich Klaasen joined them. All these names are not unknown cricketers. They are winning matches for their franchises in the tournament. Where was Virat when they were allowed to leave? Virat often talks

about how he and Ravi Shastri created a pool of fast bowlers for the Indian team. He could have done the same with RCB. Who was stopping him? Bengaluru doesn't have a proper batting line-up, and their bowling unit is below average. There is no proper Indian spinner in the team, which shows a lack of ideas and planning. Every franchise gets the same purse to buy players, but RCB often messes on the auction table.



He had enough time to come up with a champion team, but sadly, he missed the chance.

I have been following the auction for years, and RCB is the only franchise without proper planning. The paddle goes up on every player, but they don't have the knowledge or will to keep bidding for a player who can win games. They end up buying players who are not capable of achieving success. Even the ones who are not given backing. Look at what they have done to Cameroon Green in IPL 2024. He was one of the best performers

of Mumbai Indians, but the moment he joined RCB, the performance went down alarmingly. You can't hold Virat responsible for the past few seasons, but he deserves all the blame for failing to form a core. He is one of the most powerful cricketers, and there is no way the owners or the decision-makers can ignore his suggestion. He had enough time to come up with a champion team, but sadly, he missed the chance. You can enjoy the action-packed edition of Cricket Today.

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WHAT'S

HOT & NOT



JAKE FRASER-MCGURK

Australia's young batting sensation Jake Fraser-McGurk, who made a half-century in his impactful IPL debut game against Lucknow Super Giants in the last match, thumped two sixes and two boundaries in his 10-ball knock of 20 as Delhi looked for a quick finish. Delhi won the game by six wickets to record their third win in IPL 2024.



MITCHELL STARC

Needing 46 off the last three overs, Kolkata's multi-million dollar signing Mitchell Starc (0-50) conceded 18 runs as the left-arm Australian was scrappy and even gave away five extra runs when wicketkeeper Phil Salt couldn't gather the ball cleanly down the leg side. Starc has only shown glimpses of his ability for KKR so far.

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JOS BUTTLER



Jos Buttler's unbeaten century helped Rajasthan Royals chase down 224 to equal an Indian Premier League record in a breathtaking two-wicket win over Kolkata Knight Riders. The Englishman hit 107 not out off 60 balls and carried Rajasthan to 224-8 off the final ball as the team matched the league record for the highest successful run chase.

MICHAEL SLATER



Former Australian test cricketer Michael Slater has been remanded in custody while awaiting trial on 19 charges. The 54-year-old Slater has been charged with unlawful stalking or intimidation, breaking into a dwelling with intent at night, common assault occasioning bodily harm, and choking or suffocation.



RISHABH PANT



With the ball gripping on a slow surface, Pant's experimentation with Tristan Stubbs' soft-spinn paid off. The South African chipped in with two wickets off his one over. Pant did two sharp stumpings of Abhinav Manohar (8) and Shahrukh Khan (0) off Stubbs' successive deliveries. He was named the Player of the Match.



SHUBMAN GILL



Gujarat's new slow pitch at home didn't work well after captain Shubman Gill lost the toss and was put into bat. Gill fell into the trap early when he chipped an easy catch into the cover off Ishant Sharma's (2-8) full-pitched delivery. His dismissal put the Gujarat Titans on the backfoot from the start of the match.



THE WEEK THAT WAS



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JOS THE BOSS: Rajasthan Royals' Jos Buttler and Avesh Khan celebrate their win against Kolkata Knight Riders during the Indian Premier League cricket match in Kolkata. Buttler scored a hundred, his second of the 17th season.

THE WEEK
THAT WAS

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SENSATIONAL NARINE: Kolkata Knight Riders Sunil Narine celebrates scoring a century during the Indian Premier League cricket match against Rajasthan Royals.

THE WEEK THAT WAS



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MAGICAL SHOW: Sunrisers Hyderabad's Travis Head hit the fourth fastest hundred in IPL history. His three-figure mark came against Royal Challengers Bengaluru.



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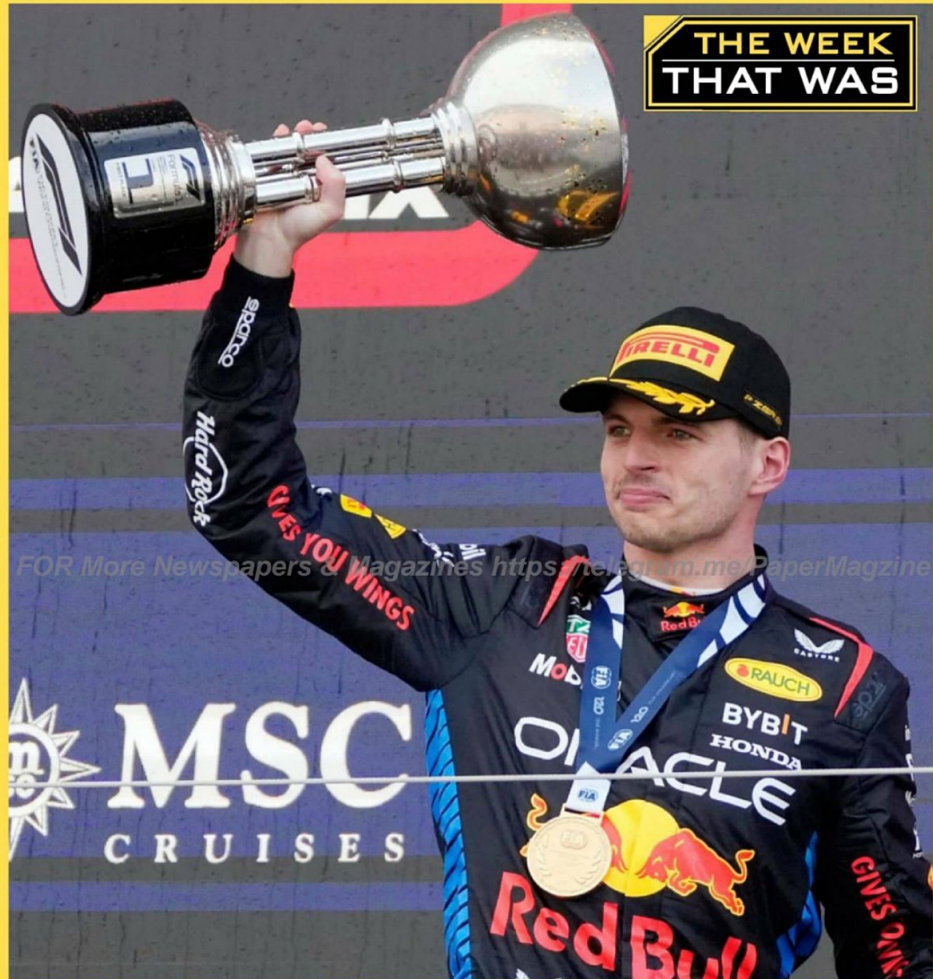
STUNNING DISPLAY: PSG's Vitinha celebrates with PSG's Achraf Hakimi after scoring his side's second goal during the Champions League quarterfinal second leg soccer match between Barcelona. The French club eliminated Barca to reach the semis.

THE WEEK THAT WAS

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WINNER'S TAKE THE CUP: Stefanos Tsitsipas of Greece holds the trophy after defeating Casper Ruud of Norway in the Monte Carlo Tennis Masters final match, 6-1, 6-4, in Monaco.

**THE WEEK
THAT WAS**



BACK TO WINNING WAYS: Red Bull driver Max Verstappen of the Netherlands holds the trophy after his win in the Japanese Formula One Grand Prix at the Suzuka Circuit in Suzuka.

Cricket Buzz



"End of road for Royal Challengers Bengaluru"

- Irfan Pathan on RCB's playoff chances



"I would have been sacked as coach had I allowed Yuzvendra Chahal to leave the franchise"

- Wasim Jaffer on RCB's controversial move



NO RETURN FOR NARINE

According to Rovman Powell, Sunil Narine doesn't want to play for the West Indies despite being a top performer in T20 leagues worldwide. The southpaw has some issues with the West Indies Cricket Board, and even after the players' efforts, the situation remains the same. Rovman Powell, who played an impactful innings against KKR, spoke about the problem. Rowman said he has been trying to convince Narine for the ICC T20 World Cup 2024, but he is not ready to listen to anyone. I've been whispering in Sunil Narine's ears for the last 12 months about the T20 World Cup selection, but he's blocked out everyone," Rovman Powell said.



FAVOURITE CRICKETER OF CHAHAL

Yuzvendra Chahal is a champion bowler with an impressive track record in white-ball cricket. He is pretty close to Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma. For years, he was Royal Challengers Bengaluru's leading bowler. However, the franchise did not retain him, and Rajasthan Royals bought him in the IPL 2022 auction. He calls Rohit his brother, and the two often engage in hilarious banter. When Chahal is with Team India, he spends much time with Rohit. However, the two veterans failed to make the list of his favorite cricketers. Yuzi named Shane Warne as his favorite player. "Shane Warne is my all-time favorite cricketer. I became a leg spinner because of him," Yuzvendra Chahal said on Star Sports.



RASHID GIVES HIMSELF A NEGATIVE RATING.

Gujarat Titans all-rounder Rashid Khan has rated his performance in the Indian Premier League 2024. The veteran is unhappy with his display and the number of wickets he has taken. He hasn't been at his best since returning to cricket after back surgery. Khan has picked up 6 wickets from 6 games in the 17th season. Rashid admitted that he struggles after surgery and is trying his best to regain his rhythm. The all-rounder is happy that his body has managed to overcome the challenges. The veteran is glad to play a small role for the last year's finalists. "I am unhappy with my wickets tally and my performance in IPL 2024. However, this is the nature of T20 cricket, and I have still not regained my rhythm after my back surgery."



GREEN SIGNAL TO PANT'S SELECTION

Rishabh Pant has made a remarkable recovery from the surgeries and is making runs for the Delhi Capitals in the Indian Premier League 2024. Several wicketkeepers are in the fray for the ICC T20 World Cup 2024 spot. Ishan Kishan, Sanju Samson, and KL Rahul compete directly with DC's captain. Moreover, former India player Ambati Rayudu wants Dinesh Karthik to be Team India's wicketkeeper after his brilliant performances for the Royal Challengers Bengaluru. However, DC head coach Ricky Ponting has come out in favor of the southpaw. He said that Pant would be his first choice if he were to select the Indian team for the global tournament.



BREAK FROM IPL

After registering low scores in IPL 2024, Glenn Maxwell voluntarily gave up his spot in the Royal Challengers Bengaluru XI. The Australian all-rounder approached RCB captain Faf du Plessis and the coaching staff, admitting that he needed a break to recover his mind and body. Maxwell felt stepping aside was best for himself and the team. "After a disappointing start to the season, I made the difficult but necessary decision to step away. I spoke with Faf and the coaches, saying, 'I think it's time to give someone else a chance.'" Having been in a similar situation before, I know it's best not to keep digging myself deeper. Taking this break will allow me to mentally and physically refresh," Maxwell told media after the loss against SRH.

IS **VIRAT KOHLI** REALLY ONE OF **THE GREATEST** **IN IPL HISTORY?**

In the electrifying world of the Indian Premier League (IPL), few names shine as brightly as that of Virat Kohli. A colossus of contemporary cricket, Kohli's feats on the field have etched his name into the annals of the sport's history. Yet, amidst...

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BY CT CONTRIBUTOR

In the electrifying world of the Indian Premier League (IPL), few names shine as brightly as that of Virat Kohli. A colossus of contemporary cricket, Kohli's feats on the field have etched his name into the annals of the sport's history. Yet, amidst the cacophony of cheers and accolades, a lingering question persists: Is Virat Kohli truly one of the greatest in IPL history? Despite his undeniable talent and staggering individual achievements, Kohli's IPL journey is marked by notable absences and perplexing choices. With no IPL title to his name, questions arise about his ability to translate personal brilliance into team success. Furthermore, his leadership at Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) raises doubts about strategic planning and player development.

As we delve deeper into the intricacies of Kohli's IPL saga, we unravel the enigma surrounding his legacy in the tournament. We aim to uncover the truth behind Virat Kohli's place in the pantheon of IPL legends by critically examining his triumphs, tribulations, and the enduring debate surrounding his greatness.

NO IPL TITLE: A GLARING GAP IN KOHLI'S LEGACY

An undeniable void in Virat Kohli's IPL legacy is the absence of an IPL title with his franchise, Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB). Despite his commendable leadership over multiple seasons, Kohli has yet to steer RCB to the coveted IPL trophy. While individual brilliance undoubtedly influences team performance, true greatness in the IPL is often measured by leading one's team to victory. Kohli's inability to secure an IPL title is a significant gap in an illustrious career. Despite his consistent performances and unwavering dedication, the elusive championship crown has remained beyond his grasp, casting a shadow over his legacy in the world's premier T20 league.

RETENTION OF BIG PLAYERS: A MISSED OPPORTUNITY

Virat Kohli's tenure as captain of Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) witnessed a curious trend in player retention that raised eyebrows among fans and analysts alike. The franchise's decision-making regarding the retention of key players left many scratching their heads, as several talented individuals who could have formed the team's backbone were allowed to depart. This puzzling approach weakened RCB's squad and raised questions about the team's long-term planning and stability under Kohli's leadership.

The failure to retain big players deprived RCB of the



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opportunity to build a formidable core group capable of sustained success in the IPL. While Kohli remained a stalwart presence, the absence of other vital figures diminished the team's overall strength and cohesion. In a league where consistency and continuity are crucial ingredients for success, RCB's inability to capitalize on the retention of big players stands out as a missed opportunity that has hindered their quest for IPL glory under Kohli's captaincy.

CREATION OF FAST BOWLING POOL: WHY NOT IN RCB?

Despite Virat Kohli's instrumental role in fostering a formidable pool of fast bowlers for the Indian national team alongside former coach Ravi Shastri, a similar emphasis on nurturing fast-bowling talent has been conspicuously absent in his leadership at Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB). While Kohli's collaboration with Shastri yielded impressive results for Team India, RCB has often struggled to field a

potent pace attack in the IPL. This disparity raises questions about the franchise's priorities and strategic planning under Kohli's captaincy. The failure to cultivate a strong contingent of fast bowlers at RCB has left the team lacking in a crucial department, ultimately impacting their ability to compete effectively in the fast-paced and high-scoring environment of T20 cricket.

FAILURE TO GROOM PLAYERS: A CRITICAL OVERSIGHT

Despite being recognized as one of the premier leaders in cricket, Virat Kohli's track record in grooming and nurturing young talent leaves much to be desired, particularly during his tenure at Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB). Despite having access to a wealth of promising young players like Devdutt Padikkal, Yuzvendra Chahal, Moeen Ali, Marcus Stoinis, and numerous others, Kohli and the RCB management have failed to fully capitalize on their



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potential. The lack of consistent opportunities and guidance for these budding talents has resulted in a stifled growth trajectory, preventing RCB from establishing a solid core of homegrown talent around Kohli. This failure to nurture and develop emerging stars impacts the team's immediate performance and undermines their long-term sustainability and competitiveness in the ever-evolving landscape of the Indian Premier League.

INCONSISTENCY IN CORE SELECTION AND OPPORTUNITIES

Virat Kohli's captaincy at Royal Challengers Bangalore (RCB) has been marred by inconsistency in core selection and the allocation of opportunities to players. Unlike successful IPL franchises establishing a cohesive core group, RCB has often shuffled its lineup and experimented with combinations, leading to instability and a lack of cohesion on the field. Additionally, Kohli's preference for overseas stars over

domestic talents has limited the chances of promising Indian batters establishing themselves in the team. This inconsistency in core selection and the uneven distribution of opportunities has hindered RCB's ability to build team chemistry and continuity, ultimately impacting their performance in the IPL.

While Virat Kohli undoubtedly ranks among the greatest cricketers of all time, his legacy in the IPL remains somewhat tainted by certain shortcomings. The absence of an IPL title, questionable decisions regarding player retention and team composition, and the failure to groom young talent are significant blemishes on an otherwise stellar career. For Kohli to cement his status as one of the greatest in IPL history, he must address these issues and lead RCB to the elusive IPL trophy while prioritizing developing and nurturing young players for the future. Only then can Kohli's greatness in the IPL be undisputed and unequivocal. ■

FEATURE

RIYAN PARAG: THE NEW POSTER BOY OF THE INDIAN CRICKET

Andre Russell entered the Indian Premier League's record books on Saturday after a magnificent knock against Sunrisers Hyderabad in match number 3 at Eden Gardens in Kolkata. Russell spanked a total 25-ball 64*. His blitz...

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BY CT CONTRIBUTOR

The Indian Premier League (IPL) 2024 has already seen its fair share of cricketing brilliance, but amidst the glitz and glamour, one player has emerged as a standout performer – Riyan Parag. Representing the Rajasthan Royals since 2019, Parag has often been the subject of scrutiny and labelled as a mere meme due to inconsistent performances. However, the ongoing IPL season seems to be rewriting his narrative. Just more than three weeks into the tournament, Parag has grabbed the spotlight with his stellar displays, amassing 318 runs in Seven matches, including three fifties and a match-winning unbeaten innings against Punjab Kings and Mumbai Indians. As he defies expectations and silences his critics, the question arises: Is IPL 2024

Riyan Parag's season to shine? Let's delve deeper into his remarkable journey and the signs of a breakthrough season for the talented young cricketer.

RIYAN PARAG: RISING ABOVE CRITICISM

Since joining the Rajasthan Royals in 2019, Riyan Parag has encountered a rollercoaster of criticisms and doubts. Despite flashes of brilliance, he often found himself under the shadow of skepticism, labelled as a player who couldn't quite live up to the lofty expectations set upon him. Throughout four seasons, spanning from 2019 to 2023, Parag accumulated 861 runs in 59 matches, a tally that, while respectable, failed to showcase his true potential fully.

THE TURNING POINT: IPL 2024

However, IPL 2024 has emerged as a defining chapter in Parag's cricketing journey. He has accumulated 261 runs in five matches, which speaks



volumes about his newfound form and confidence. What's more impressive is the nature of these runs – three half-centuries and two not-out innings, displaying consistency and composure under pressure. His standout performance came against the Punjab Kings, where he remained unbeaten with a blistering 84*, guiding his team to victory in a crucial run chase. This inning highlighted his ability to anchor innings and showcased a maturity beyond his years. He managed another impressive knock against Mumbai Indians. His unbeaten 54 guided the team to a fourth straight win. Although he scored 76 runs against Gujarat Titans, Rajasthan lost by three wickets.

EARNING RECOGNITION AND NATIONAL ATTENTION

Parag's stellar performances in IPL 2024 have not gone unnoticed. Cricket enthusiasts and experts alike have quickly acknowledged his resurgence, with discussions swirling around his potential inclusion in the Indian T20 World Cup squad. His ability to

perform under pressure and adapt to match situations has set him apart from his peers. Moreover, his recent form is a testament to his dedication and hard work behind the scenes.

Parag's success in IPL 2024 is not a stroke of luck but a result of his consistent hard work and determination. Even outside the IPL, he has been a vital cog in the Assam cricket team, delivering standout performances and contributing significantly to his team's success. His recent form in the IPL only underscores his readiness to step up to the international stage and represent his country at the highest level.

One of the notable changes in Parag's role this season is his batting position. Previously used lower down the order, he has been promoted to number four, which has paid dividends for the Rajasthan Royals. Batting higher up the order has allowed Parag to express



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himself more freely and showcase his full range of strokes without the pressure of a collapsing middle order. The IPL has often served as a platform for young Indian talents to make a mark and catapult themselves into the national team setup. With his stellar performances in IPL 2024, Riyan Parag is undoubtedly knocking on the doors of the Indian team selectors. His ability to perform under pressure, adapt to different situations, and deliver consistent performances make him a strong contender for a T20 World Cup squad spot.

UNWAVERING SUPPORT FROM RAJASTHAN ROYALS

What makes Riyan Parag's journey even more remarkable is his unwavering support from the Rajasthan Royals since the tender age of 17. Since his debut in 2019, the franchise has shown immense faith in his abilities, nurturing his talent and providing ample opportunities to showcase his skills on the big stage of IPL cricket. This backing from the team management has played a crucial role in shaping

Parag's development as a cricketer, instilling in him the confidence and belief needed to thrive at the highest level. It's a testament to the franchise's commitment to nurturing young talent and providing them a platform to shine. Parag's rise to prominence is a shining example of this remarkable partnership.

Riyan Parag's journey in IPL 2024 exemplifies the power of resilience, determination, and unwavering support. Parag's transformation is inspirational, from facing criticisms and doubts to emerging as a standout performer for the Rajasthan Royals. His remarkable performances have silenced his critics and ignited discussions about his potential inclusion in the Indian T20 World Cup squad. Parag continues to shine on the cricketing stage as a beacon of hope for aspiring young cricketers, reminding them that dreams can turn into reality with hard work, perseverance, and proper support. The future looks bright for Riyan Parag, and his journey is a testament to the magic of IPL cricket in shaping the careers of budding talents. ■

SANJU SAMSON: A COMPELLING CONTENDER FOR INDIA'S T20 WORLD CUP SQUAD

In the high-stakes arena of T20 cricket, where every run and every wicket can alter the course of a match, the quest for the ideal squad becomes paramount for Team India as they gear up for the T20 World Cup. Amidst the plethora of talented cricketers vying...

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BY CT CONTRIBUTOR

In the high-stakes arena of T20 cricket, where every run and every wicket can alter the course of a match, the quest for the ideal squad becomes paramount for Team India as they gear up for the T20 World Cup. Amidst the plethora of talented cricketers vying for a spot in the team, one name stands out as a compelling contender—Sanju Samson. With his exceptional skills behind the stumps, impressive leadership qualities, and dynamic batting prowess, Samson presents a persuasive case for inclusion in India's T20 side. As the cricketing world turns its attention towards the marquee event, the spotlight shines brightly on Samson, whose journey from promising talent to seasoned campaigner has been marked by consistency and maturity. In this blog, we delve into why Sanju Samson deserves a place in India's T20 World Cup squad, analyzing his contributions both on and off the field and exploring how he can play a pivotal role in India's quest for glory on the global stage.

BRILLIANT LEADERSHIP

Sanju Samson's brilliance behind the stumps adds an invaluable dimension to his candidacy for India's T20 World Cup squad. Renowned for his impeccable wicketkeeping skills, Samson possesses the agility, reflexes, and technical proficiency required to excel in

the fast-paced format of T20 cricket. His safe hands and lightning-quick reactions make him a reliable presence behind the stumps, instilling confidence in the bowling unit and supporting the team's fielding efforts. In the frenetic environment of T20 cricket, where every run saved is as crucial as every run scored, Samson's adeptness in marshaling the fielding unit becomes a significant asset for Team India. Whether it's effecting lightning-fast stumpings or executing acrobatic catches, Samson's presence ensures that India's fielding standards remain consistently high—a factor that can make all the difference in tightly contested T20 encounters. As India seeks to assemble a formidable squad for the T20 World Cup, Samson's brilliance behind the stumps positions him as a compelling candidate to don the gloves and play a pivotal role in the team's quest for glory.

Sanju Samson's impressive leadership qualities make him a standout candidate for India's T20 World Cup squad. Having captained the Rajasthan Royals (RR) for three full seasons and into his fourth, Samson has demonstrated his ability to lead by example and inspire his team to perform at their best. Under his stewardship, RR reached the finals in 2022, showcasing Samson's astute decision-making and calm demeanor under pressure. Samson's leadership extends beyond the cricketing field, where he fosters a culture of teamwork, resilience, and camaraderie within the squad. His ability to communicate



effectively with teammates, strategize tactically during matches, and remain composed in challenging situations sets him apart as a natural leader. In the high-pressure environment of the T20 World Cup, Samson's leadership qualities can provide stability and guidance to the Indian team, helping them navigate through crucial moments and emerge victorious on the global stage. As India seeks to assemble a cohesive unit for the tournament, Samson's impressive leadership credentials make him a compelling choice for inclusion in the squad.

A MENTOR IN THE MOULD OF DHONI

Sanju Samson's potential role as a mentor in the mold of MS Dhoni adds another layer of significance to his candidacy for India's T20 World Cup squad. Like Dhoni, Samson possesses a calm and composed demeanor and a wealth of experience in high-pressure situations. With his astute cricketing knowledge and leadership acumen, Samson can provide invaluable guidance and support to his teammates, particularly to captain Rohit Sharma. Just as Dhoni complemented Sachin Tendulkar during India's successful World Cup campaign in 2011, Samson has the potential to play a similar mentoring role alongside Rohit Sharma. His

ability to remain level-headed under pressure and make shrewd tactical decisions can assist Rohit in navigating crucial moments during matches. Samson's experience as a captain in the IPL can also offer valuable insights into team dynamics and strategies, further enhancing his mentorship role within the squad. As India aims to clinch glory in the T20 World Cup, Samson's mentorship in the mold of Dhoni could prove instrumental in shaping the team's journey towards success.

DYNAMIC BATTING SKILLSET

Sanju Samson's dynamic batting skillset adds significant firepower to India's T20 World Cup aspirations. Renowned for his ability to adapt to different match situations, Samson can play aggressively and anchor the innings per the team's requirements. His vast array of strokes, impeccable timing, and ability to find gaps in the field make him a formidable force in the middle order. Whether accelerating the run rate with aggressive strokeplay or stabilizing the innings with a composed approach, Samson's versatility adds depth to India's batting lineup. With his consistent performances in domestic and IPL cricket, Samson has proven his mettle as a

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reliable run-scorer, capable of turning the tide of the match in India's favor. As India seeks to assemble a potent batting unit for the T20 World Cup, Samson's dynamic batting skillset makes him a valuable asset in the quest for championship glory.

A CALMING INFLUENCE IN THE MIDDLE ORDER

Sanju Samson's calming influence in the middle order could prove instrumental for India's T20 World Cup campaign. Amidst the firepower of aggressive stroke-makers like Suryakumar Yadav, Hardik Pandya, and Ravindra Jadeja, Samson's composed demeanor and ability to stabilize the innings are valuable to the team's batting lineup. In the fast-paced and often chaotic environment of T20 cricket, the role of a calming influence cannot be overstated. Samson's knack for rotating the strike, absorbing pressure, and building partnerships can prove pivotal in steering India out of challenging situations and consolidating the innings during crucial match phases. His experience navigating pressure situations in domestic and IPL cricket further enhances his suitability for the role.

As India seeks to assemble a well-rounded squad for the T20 World Cup, Samson's calming influence in the middle order provides reassurance and stability, ensuring the team maintains composure even in the most high-pressure situations. Sanju Samson emerges as a compelling choice for inclusion in India's T20 side for the upcoming World Cup, owing to his multifaceted skill set, exemplary leadership acumen, and unwavering consistency. His brilliance behind the stumps adds a layer of solidity to the team's fielding unit, while his dynamic batting style injects firepower into the middle order. Furthermore, Samson's mentorship qualities and experience as a captain make him a valuable asset in guiding and galvanizing the team towards success.

As India sets its sights on assembling a formidable squad for the T20 World Cup, Samson emerges as a beacon of hope, capable of making significant contributions on the global stage. With his diverse skill set and leadership qualities, Samson embodies the resilience and determination necessary to propel India towards championship glory. He is an indispensable asset in the team's pursuit of cricketing excellence. ■

FEATURE

SIX-HITTING SHIVAM DUBE IS NOT JUST A 'SPIN BASHER' ANYMORE

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This season, Shivam Dube has been the stand-out performer for the Chennai Super Kings. The tall left-handed batter has continued from where he left off in the last season. Even against the arch-rivals Mumbai Indians, Dube scored an unbeaten...





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BY CT CONTRIBUTOR

This season, Shivam Dube has been the stand-out performer for the Chennai Super Kings. The tall left-handed batter has continued from where he left off in the last season. Even against the arch-rivals Mumbai Indians, Dube scored an unbeaten knock of 66 in 38 deliveries. He has been attacking from the word go, setting the IPL 2024 on fire. Shivam Dube has scored 242 runs in this IPL with an impressive strike rate of 163.51. With his consistent performances, he is constantly knocking on the T20 World Cup 2024 selection doors. It is now challenging to ignore the crucial contributions and his growing stature.

Shivam Dube was touted as the designated 'spin hitter' of the CSK franchise last year. He used to attack the spinners from ball one. But opposition teams tried to keep him quiet, bowling fast bowlers from the other end. The fast bowlers used to bowl short balls where he struggled to time them or hit them for boundaries. But

this year, the left-hander has notched up a level further. He is not just a spin basher anymore.

SHIVAM DUBE AGAINST DIFFERENT TYPES OF BOWLERS IN IPL 2024

Dube is continuing his merry way against the slower bowlers. He is striking at 191.2 with an average of 65 against the spinners, which is what we expect him to do. The fear of spin-hitting Dube was seen on Sunday against the Mumbai Indians. When Dube walked into bat, the spinners were taken off, and the fast bowlers came in to bowl. The opposition's plans went haywire with him and a pace hitter at the other end.

DUBE IS NOT JUST A SPIN HITTER

Dube has been equally good against the medium-fast bowlers. In the 2024 IPL, he scored runs with a strike rate 177.5 against medium-fast bowlers with a healthy average of 63. He is taking them to the cleaners, scoring more boundaries than the previous seasons. Yesterday, Romario Shephard kept peppering him with the short ball. But the Southpaw cleared him over the ropes with utmost ease. He pulled one over mid-off with brute force while guiding another short ball over



**BOWLER TYPE
AVERAGE STRIKE RATE**

SPINNERS	MEDIUM FAST/FAST MEDIUM	PROPER FAST
65	63	51
191.2	177.5	118.6

the third man for a maximum. Shepherd bowled another short ball the next time but again disappeared to the square leg boundary. The range of hitting short balls from mid-off to square leg and deep midwicket was displayed. If you try to bluff him with a fuller delivery, with a languid swing of the bat, he creams you through the covers for four or six. This is a big plus for him, and his chances of getting selected in the World Cup Squad increase further.

He still has a chink in his armor. The left-handed batter is scoring relatively slower against the quick-pacers bowling over 140-145 KPH. He strikes at 118.60 against these types of bowlers. However, he is not getting out often against them. The average of 51 is explanatory, and although Dube is not scoring fast against them, he is not getting out either. So, he is maximizing his matchups against his favorable bowlers while protecting his wicket against his unfavorable matchup. But not every team has a pacer of that quality.



Managing four overs from that bowler would not be a very huge challenge. Additionally, like CSK, the Indian team can club him with a pace hitter like Rinku Singh or Virat Kohli to keep the boundaries flowing.

Dube's six-hitting technique can be attributed to two main factors: a clean bat swing and brute force. But despite all the pyro methods, he has the gifted timing ability. Shivam Dube's timing is quite an underrated part of his batting.

BALLS PER BOUNDARY

Dube has hit 20 Fours and 15 sixes in the total of 148 balls faced this season. This means he scores a boundary every 4.22 balls he faces. On the other hand, Klaasen scores a boundary every four balls he faces, while Pooran scores a boundary every 4.75 deliveries. He hits the ball clean and hard. When he hits the ball, it will land in the stands. While it felt like the last season was a fluke, Dube has continued to grow in

stature this season, making him hard to ignore. India only has Suryakumar Yadav, who can be destructive against spin in the middle overs. Dube is the other one. But we have yet to see Dube bowl. He bowled very well in his limited opportunities before the IPL, using cutters cleverly. With the resurgence of Dube, he can perfectly fit in the number 4-5 role. But this means India needs to open with someone like Ishan Kishan, who gives the wicket-keeping option. If not in the playing XI, the Mumbai Southpaw at least deserves a place in the Indian T20 World Cup 2024 squad. India can use him as a pure batter against spin-heavy oppositions like Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan.

This is quite a problematic headache for the selectors ahead of the World Cup. He is letting his bat do all the talking. With 2-3 more innings before the selection happens, he would most likely seal his place in the World Cup squad. For now, the Dube juggernaut continues to roll... ■

NEW YEAR, SAME RCB: UNPACKING ROYAL CHALLENGERS BENGALURU'S STRUGGLES IN IPL 2024

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As another year of the IPL dawns, Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) fans again find themselves in a disheartening predicament: their beloved team languishing at the bottom of the points table. Despite the annual surge of excitement and hope during preseason...

BY CT CONTRIBUTOR

As another year of the IPL dawns, Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) fans again find themselves in a disheartening predicament: their beloved team languishing at the bottom of the points table. Despite the annual surge of excitement and hope during preseason, the narrative remains all too familiar for the devoted RCB faithful. The 2024 season has been particularly vexing, witnessing the team secure only one victory out of their first seven matches, with even defeats suffered on their home turf—a perplexing scenario that baffles supporters and analysts alike. RCB, affectionately dubbed the home of the 'KGF' trio—comprising Kohli, Glenn Maxwell, and Faf du Plessis—has yet to witness

the simultaneous brilliance of these star players. While Virat Kohli has undoubtedly shone as a standout performer, amassing over 300 runs, including a century, his brilliance has failed to translate into collective success as the team grapples to rediscover its winning form.

AUCTION FAILURES

RCB's dismal performance in IPL 2024 can be partially attributed to their failures during the auction. The team had the opportunity to secure game-changing players like Mitchell Starc and Pat Cummins, whose prowess in the bowling department could have provided the much-needed balance to the squad. However, instead of investing in proven performers, RCB made questionable choices, such as plumping for crore on Alzarri Joseph, who failed to live up to expectations, and opting for Yash Dayal, whose lack of





experience was evident in crucial moments. These missteps in player selection depleted the team's resources and left them with a weakened bowling attack incapable of consistently challenging opposition batters, ultimately contributing to their downfall in the tournament.

WEAK SPIN BOWLING

RCB's struggles in IPL 2024 can also be attributed to their weak spin bowling department. Unlike other successful teams in the league, RCB lacked a reputed spinner capable of controlling the game and picking crucial wickets in the middle overs. Spinners are pivotal in limiting run-scoring opportunities and breaking partnerships, especially on pitches that assist slow bowlers. RCB's inability to field a competent spin bowler put additional pressure on their already struggling pace attack, making it easier for opponents to plan their innings and capitalize on scoring opportunities. This deficiency hindered their ability to contain runs and limited their options in terms of strategic variations during crucial stages of the game, ultimately contributing to their inconsistent performance throughout the tournament.

BATTING MISFIRING

RCB's batting lineup, aside from Virat Kohli, has been a significant disappointment in IPL 2024. While Kohli has showcased his class with over 300 runs, including a century, the same cannot be said for the rest of the batting order. Key players like Glenn Maxwell and Faf du Plessis have failed to deliver consistently, leaving Kohli to carry most of the run-scoring burden. This over-reliance on one player has made RCB's batting predictable and more accessible for opponents to strategize against. Without significant contributions from other batters, even Kohli's remarkable efforts have often fallen short of securing victories for the team. The lack of form and consistency among the other batters has been a critical factor in RCB's inability to post competitive totals or successfully chase down challenging scores.

CAPTAINCY MISMANAGEMENT

Captaincy mismanagement under Faf du Plessis has been a notable issue plaguing RCB in IPL 2024. Du Plessis' decision-making during crucial moments of matches has come under scrutiny, particularly regarding player utilization. There have been instances



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of questionable choices, such as underutilizing proven performers like Lockie Ferguson and not giving adequate game time to experienced campaigners like Karn Sharma. This lack of trust in certain players has led to ineffective resource management and missed opportunities for RCB. Additionally, relying on lesser-experienced players in high-pressure situations instead of utilizing seasoned campaigners has often backfired for the team, resulting in costly errors and ultimately contributing to their inconsistent performances throughout the tournament.

FAILURE TO GROOM PLAYERS

RCB's failure to groom and retain players over the years has been a significant setback for the team in IPL 2024. The inability to nurture talent and build a core group of players has hindered their long-term success. Former RCB players like Devdutt Padikkal and Yuzvendra Chahal, who have flourished with other teams, highlight the team's lapse in player development and retention strategy. This revolving door policy disrupts team chemistry and prevents establishing a cohesive unit capable of maturing and improving together. RCB is in a perpetual cycle of rebuilding

each season without a stable foundation of homegrown talent, making it challenging to establish consistency and compete with more settled teams in the league. Addressing this issue and prioritizing player development could be crucial for RCB's future success in the IPL.

Royal Challengers Bengaluru's struggles in IPL 2024 can be attributed to a combination of factors, including auction failures, weak spin bowling, inconsistent batting performances, captaincy mismanagement, and a failure to groom and retain players. These issues have culminated in a disappointing campaign for the team, leaving fans and stakeholders alike frustrated with their lack of progress. To turn their fortunes around, RCB must address these shortcomings and implement strategic changes in their approach to team building, player management, and on-field decision-making. Only through comprehensive reforms and a commitment to long-term planning can RCB hope to break free from the cycle of underachievement and establish itself as a genuine contender in the highly competitive landscape of the IPL. ■

FOUR BEST PERFORMING UNCAPPED PLAYERS SO FAR IN IPL 2024

Every year, the grand spectacle of the Indian Premier League (IPL) sets the stage for young talents to find their spotlight as they strive to prove their mettle amidst roaring crowds. Uncapped players...

BY AAKASH SAINI

Every year, the grand spectacle of the Indian Premier League (IPL) sets the stage for young talents to find their spotlight as they strive to prove their mettle amidst roaring crowds. Uncapped players, who are often overlooked, seize this esteemed platform to carve their path toward glory.

Like all prior IPL seasons, the 17th edition has also witnessed an overwhelming upsurge of sparkling young talents. Here at Crictoday, we look at four uncapped stars who have most illuminated the landscape of IPL 2024.



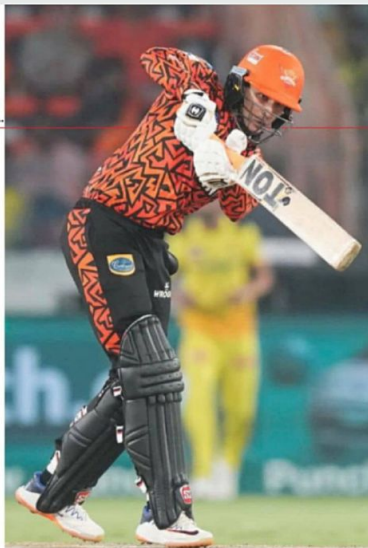
1. MAYANK YADAV

Making his IPL debut in 2024 with a match against Punjab Kings, LSG quick Mayank Yadav celebrated the occasion with the prized scalps of Jonny Bairstow, Prabhsimran Singh, and Jitesh Sharma. Yadav's three-wicket burst ensured that LSG walked off with a 21-run win in a high-scoring thriller, landing him a 'Player of the Match' award on debut. Moreover, the tearaway fast bowler sent down a 155.7 kmph bullet to Shikhar Dhawan in the game. The Delhi-based cricketer backed up his performance with another sizzling three-fer, this time against the RCB in Bengaluru. Mayank Yadav's match-winning spell of 3-14 even included the key wickets of Glenn Maxwell and Cameron Green and a thunderbolt that clocked 156.7kph.



2. SHASHANK SINGH

Chhattisgarh's perennial underachiever, Shashank Singh, catapulted himself to unprecedented stardom this IPL 2024 season with twin batting bombardments against Gujarat Titans and SRH. Against the Titans, the Punjab Kings star whacked a 29-ball 61* to conquer a 200-run task. Next, Shashank Singh scored an unbeaten 25-ball 46 against SRH, nearly pulling off yet another tense chase at Mullanpur. The hard-hitting radical has minted 146 runs across Six IPL 2024 innings at an astonishing average of 73.



3. ABHISHEK SHARMA

Brash young opener Abhishek Sharma pounded a 23-ball 63 against Mumbai Indians to set up SRH's colossal 277-run total for an all-time IPL record in late March. Nurtured by Yuvraj Singh, the prodigious batting talent also bashed a match-winning 12-ball 37 against CSK roughly a week later to bag the 'Player of the Match' award. With 211 runs from Six innings this IPL 2024 season at a strike rate of over 197.19, 23-year-old Abhishek Sharma is already tipped as one of the Team India stars for the future.

4. RIYAN PARAG

Rajasthan Royals' all-round menace Riyan Parag carried his rich Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy form to IPL 2024 with unparalleled success. Unlike the past few seasons, the cricketer felt his presence for the franchise from the outset, listing a 29-ball 43 against LSG before scoring successive unbeaten half-centuries against Delhi Capitals and Mumbai Indians. While Parag blasted a match-winning 45-ball 84* against the Capitals, his run-chase masterclass against Mumbai Indians set up Rajasthan Royals' six-wicket win. The dashing middle-order batter even seized the coveted 'Orange Cap' from Virat Kohli at one point this season. He scored 76 off 48 balls, including 5 sixes and 3 fours, against Gujarat Titans, taking his run tally to 318 in Seven games.

7 FIELDERS WITH THE MOST CATCHES IN IPL HISTORY

Virat Kohli entered the record books in the Indian Premier League. This time, it was for his fielding effort. Kohli, one of the best fielders in the game, is now the player with the most catches in the cash-rich league as a non-wicket-keeper or an outfielder...

BY CT CONTRIBUTOR

Virat Kohli entered the record books in the Indian Premier League. This time, it was for his fielding effort. Kohli, one of the best fielders in the game, is now the player with the most catches in the cash-rich league as a non-wicket-keeper or an outfielder. The 35-year-old broke the longstanding record of former IPL ace Suresh Raina. On Saturday, Kohli attained the milestone in match number 19 of the IPL 2024 season against Rajasthan Royals in Jaipur.

The match saw Kohli smack his record-extending 8th IPL century as Royal Challengers Bengaluru finished with a score of 183/3. Kohli did the heavy lifting for his side but didn't find much support. His record-breaking knock had several records. He added a 125-run stand with Faf du Plessis. However, RR had other ideas as a match-winning 148-run stand between Jos Buttler and Sanju Samson helped the hosts win comfortably. Buttler pout-powered Kohli with his 6th IPL ton.

Notably, Kohli reached his milestone catch when Yash Dayal dismissed Riyan Parag. Kohli completed the catch at mid-wicket. Kohli's catching ability, within the circle and on the boundary, is something for budding cricketers to admire. His athleticism makes him one of the safest catchers in world cricket.

We analyze players with the most catches in IPL history.



VIRAT KOHLI (110 CATCHES)

As per ESPNcricinfo, Kohli, who played his 242nd IPL match, raced to 110 catches. The loyal RCB man has been plying his trade in the IPL since 2008. Kohli's best season in terms of catches was 2023. He took 13 catches for RCB in 14 matches. He is the competition's highest scorer with 7579 runs at 38.27. He owns 8 tons and 52 fifties. Overall, in the 20-over format, the 35-year-old veteran has claimed 176 catches.



SURESH RAINA (109 CATCHES)

Former Chennai Super Kings ace Suresh Raina was at the top in terms of catches all this while, having finished his IPL journey with 109. Raina went on to claim 98 catches for Chennai from 176 matches. He took another 11 catches for the Gujarat Lions when CSK was suspended. Raina's best campaign was in 2014 when he took 12 catches from 16 matches. The southpaw, a leading fielder, ended with 5528 runs from 205 IPL matches. In T20s, he took 172 catches.

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KIERON POLLARD (103 CATCHES)

Kieron Pollard is a T20 veteran and legend. One of the most complete players in this format, Pollard is known for his batting, bowling, agile fielding, and greatness in hitting sixes. Pollard is the only overseas player in IPL history to finish his journey with 100-plus catches. He took 103 catches for Mumbai Indians in 189 matches. He owns the record for MI with 15 catches in the 2017 season. The giant West Indian owns one of the safest pairs of hands. Pollard scored 3412 runs in the IPL. In T20s, he owns a sensational 362 catches from 660 matches.



ROHIT SHARMA (99 CATCHES)

Another IPL veteran, Rohit Sharma, has been going strong since the inaugural campaign in 2008. The former Deccan Chargers ace is closing in on 100 catches. He has 99 under his belt. Seventy-seven of his catches have been for Mumbai Indians. He took 13 catches for the side in the 2012 season, his best return in a campaign. Rohit owns 6280 IPL runs at 29.48. In the 20-over format, the senior MI player has claimed 167 catches to date.

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SHIKHAR DHAWAN (98 CATCHES)

Shikhar Dhawan doesn't drop many catches, and his total of 98 is a testament to that. Dhawan has played for several franchises in the IPL and is currently the captain of Punjab Kings. He has played 221 matches to date. Dhawan, who enjoyed the most at Sunrise's Hyderabad, holds the joint-most catches in a season. He took 12 catches in the 2018 season from 16 matches. The southpaw owns 6755 runs in the IPL. In T20s, he has collected 135 catches to date.



RAVINDRA JADEJA (98 CATCHES)

One of the best all-rounders across formats, Ravindra Jadeja's fielding attributes make him a class act. Another player is equally sharp both inside the ring and on the boundary. His presence of mind is of the utmost level. Jadeja has 98 catches in the IPL from 230 matches. Eighty of his catches have come for the Super Kings. He also played for RR and GL in the cash-rich league. Jadeja has 2776 IPL runs alongside 153 wickets. He has 127 catches in T20 cricket.

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AB DE VILLIERS (90 CATCHES)

AB de Villiers wasn't only Mr 360 in batting but also Mr 360 in fielding. In addition to being a top wicket-keeper, de Villiers also mastered fielding as a non-wicket-keeper. He was sound across all parts of the field with added brilliance on the boundary. In 184 IPL matches, he was seen as a fielder in 130 games. He claimed 90 catches, including 70 for RCB. In the IPL 2016 season, ABD took 19 catches as a fielder., a record for a single campaign. ABD also kept wickets in 52 IPL matches. He impacted with 28 catches and eight stumpings. De Villiers finished his career with 5162 runs from 170 IPL innings.

BATTERS WITH THE MOST SIXES IN T20 CRICKET

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Mumbai Indians legend Rohit Sharma hammered a sparkling century in Match 29 of the Indian Premier League against the Chennai Super Kings. However, his knock of 105* from 63 balls wasn't enough, as the Super Kings won by 20 runs. CSK posted 206/4...

BY CT CONTRIBUTOR

Mumbai Indians legend Rohit Sharma hammered a sparkling century in Match 29 of the Indian Premier League against the Chennai Super Kings. However, his knock of 105* from 63 balls wasn't enough, as the Super Kings won by 20 runs. CSK posted 206/4 in 20 overs. Shivam Dube and Ruturaj Gaikwad shone for CSK with respective fifties. In response, MI managed a score of 186/6. Rohit was the lone fighter. During his knock, the veteran MI stalwart scripted several records. He became the first MI player with multiple

IPL tons. He became the first MI player with 5500 T20 runs and the highest scorer in MI versus CSK IPL matches. Rohit, who smashed five sixes in his knock, got past 500 maximums in T20 cricket. He reached the landmark with his third six-hit against Ravindra Jadeja in the 11th over. He has joined an illustrious tally of players with 500 T20 sixes. Rohit is the first Indian batter to clock 500 sixes in T20s.

The former MI skipper's batting display was fineskipper's batting display was fine as he enjoyed a fine run. Here are the players with the most sixes in T20s.

CHRIS GAYLE (1056 SIXES)

Universe King Chris Gayle holds the record for most sixes in T20 cricket. The former West Indian ace dominated leagues across the world. In 463 matches, Gayle went on to smash 1056 sixes. His sixes count remains the highest in the format. Gayle also holds the record for most sixes in IPL history (357). He finished with a total of 14562 runs in T20s at 36.22. He carried a strike rate of 144.75. He went on to smash 22 centuries and 88 half-centuries. Notably, 1899 of his runs came in T20Is for West Indies. Gayle was an IPL legend as well. He went on to register a total of 4965 runs from 142 matches. Gayle owns the most sixes for WI with 124.



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KIERON POLLARD (860 SIXES)

Kieron Pollard has had a massive influence in T20 cricket with his all-round abilities. The giant West Indian is among the greatest to grace the format. Pollard owns 860 sixes in T20 cricket. Pollard, the third-highest scorer in T20s, also finished his IPL career with 223 maximums for the Mumbai Indians. In 660 matches, Pollard has smashed 12900 runs. He averages 31.46 and carries a strike rate of 150.98. He has one century and 59 fifties. Pollard finished his IPL stint as a player in the 2022 season. In 189 IPL matches for the Mumbai Indians, he clobbered 3412 runs at 28.67, striking at 147.32. Notably, 1569 Pollard's 12900 runs in the 20-over format came for West Indies. Pollard averaged 25.30 for WI and carried a strike rate of 135.14. He hit 99 sixes for WI.



ANDRE RUSSELL (678 SIXES)

The third player in this list is also a West Indian in the form of Andre Russell. Still going strong, Russell has muscled his way to 678 sixes. He has enjoyed himself in the 2024 IPL season for the Kolkata Knight Riders. Former Delhi Daredevils player Russell surpassed 200 sixes in IPL this season and became the first KKR player with 200-plus sixes. He owns 203 IPL maximums and is currently tied with Suresh Raina. In 487 T20 matches, the big-hitting Russell owns 8324 runs at 27.38. His strike rate reads 170-plus. In the IPL, Russell has 2377 runs with an SR of 175.55. Meanwhile, 955 of his runs have come for West Indies in T20Is. He has 81 sixes for WI.



COLIN MUNRO (548 SIXES)

New Zealand's Colin Munro is still going strong across several T20 leagues. Munro owns 548 sixes in T20 cricket. With 10961 runs, Munro has enjoyed a 14-year-old career, averaging 30.44. He owns 5 tons and 67 fifties. He also owns over 900 fours. Munro, who last played for New Zealand in 2020, is one of the two Kiwi batters with 100-plus sixes. He smashed 107 sixes for NZ, scoring 1724 runs from 65 matches. Munro made a handful of 13 appearances in the IPL, hitting eight maximums. A quality name in the Big Bash League, Munro has 61 sixes in the premier Australian T20 league.



ROHIT SHARMA (502 SIXES)

Rohit is the latest entrant in the 500-plus Sixes club. The Indian skipper has 502 sixes currently. He achieved the mark in his 432nd match. He owns 11417 runs in T20s at 31.02. The celebrated cricketer has 8 tons and 74 fifties. Notably, he also owns 1000-plus fours in the 20-over format. In the IPL, Rohit has smashed the second-most sixes. He owns 272 maximums and is only behind Gayle. Having played 249 matches, Rohit owns 6472 runs in the IPL. He has 42 fifties and 2 tons. Rohit is the leading six-hitter in T20Is. He has smashed 190 maximums. Only Martin Gupthill has 150-plus sixes in T20Is (173). Rohit is also closing in on 4000 T20 runs for Team India. He is the second-highest scorer in T20Is overall. He owns 3974 runs at 31.79 with the help of five tons and 29 fifties. He has the joint-most tons in T20Is alongside Glenn Maxwell (5).



ALEX HALES (494 SIXES)

Alex Hales is closing in on a milestone of 500 sixes. A sturdy T20 veteran, Hales owns 494 maximums from 449 matches. He has scored 12319 runs at 29.68. Notably, the Englishman has clobbered 1,300-plus fours as well. Hales, who amassed over 2000 runs for England, owns 70 sixes in T20Is. He is also the fifth-highest six-hitter in the BBL, having managed 107. Hales featured in only six IPL matches, clobbering six sixes and scoring 148 runs at 24.66.

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Mohammad Shami



Eid Mubarak to all my dear friends and family - Mohammad Shami



Kuldeep Yadav



Great performance by our bowlers - Kuldeep Yadav



Shikhar Dhawan



You're Always With Me, My Boy - Shikhar Dhawan

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NEHA DHUPIA AND KAREENA KAPOOR'S HILARIOUS REACTION GOES VIRAL...



MS DHONI SPOTTED AT MUMBAI AIRPORT ALONG WITH CSK TEAM



RISHABH PANT WORKING HARD ON HIS FITNESS



VIRAT KOHLI GIVEN A HILARIOUS REACTION WHEN FANS CHANT CHEKKU



MS DHONI CONQUER THE NIGHT AT WANKHEDE STADIUM



@MichaelVaughan

"This is surely one of the greatest ever T20 innings .. absolutely incredible @josbutter"



@IrfanPathan

"RR ka Jos high hai boss. Mind blowing inning from Jos Buttler"



@bhogleharsha

"IPL is not as much about coaching as it is about managing talent"



@cricketaakash

"Hardik Pandya's presence might not have benefited Mumbai Indians yet...but his absence is definitely hurting Gujarat Titans this season"



@DineshKarthik

"Couldn't cross the line but we gave it our all"



@WasimJaffer14

"Back to back away wins for DC. All Ind bowling attack working well for them"

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TOP STORIES



“

“We were close to tying the game, but they were superior”

- Atlético coach Diego Simeone on Borussia Dortmund's win in Champions League

WERDER BREMEN SUSPENDS MIDFIELDER

Werder Bremen suspended former Liverpool midfielder Keita for the rest of the season after he skipped the team's last Bundesliga match. Bremen said in a statement that it also gave Keita “a substantial fine” and that he will no longer train with the team. Keita chose not to travel with the rest of the team to the game at Bayer Leverkusen and instead went home after he found out he was not going to be in the starting lineup, the club said. “As a club, we won't tolerate Naby's behavior. He let his team down in a time of difficulty surrounding our recent run of form and squad availability and put his own interests above those of the team. We can't allow that,” Bremen sporting director Clemens Fritz said. Keita joined Bremen from Liverpool last summer but struggled to make an impact in an injury-plagued season. The 29-year-old Guinea midfielder made only five Bundesliga appearances all season, four of those as a substitute.



“

“When it was 11 against 11 we were well organized. The sending off changes everything”

- Barcelona coach Xavi Hernández on his team's defeat against Paris Saint-Germain



ROMA'S NDIKA DISCHARGED FROM HOSPITAL

Roma defender Evan Ndicka was released from hospital, a day after he collapsed at the end of a Serie A match. Ndicka appeared to have suffered a collapsed left lung, Roma said in a statement. No cardiac issues were detected in multiple tests, and Ndicka was discharged from Santa Maria della Misericordia Hospital in Udine, Roma added. Ndicka fell to the ground in the 71st minute, far from the action, and started pointing at his chest. He never lost consciousness and was taken off on a stretcher two minutes later, giving a thumb up to the crowd. Roma said Ndicka, a 24-year-old Ivory Coast international, will undergo more tests back in Rome.

TSITSIPAS WINS MONTE CARLO MASTERS

Stefanos Tsitsipas swept aside Casper Ruud 6-1, 6-4 to win the clay-court Monte Carlo Masters for the third time in four years, and then wept in his chair. Tsitsipas sat holding his head in his hands, briefly crying as he took in his first title of the year and biggest tournament victory for two years. "I'm very proud of myself today. I had been waiting for a moment like this for a long time," said the 12th-ranked Tsitsipas, who reached a career-high No. 3 ranking in 2021. "I did not know what was going to happen this week." The big-serving Greek also won the title in 2021 and 2022 and this latest trophy at the Monte Carlo Country Club took him to 11 career titles overall. It was his first trophy since August last year, when he won a modest ATP 250-level tournament on outdoor hard courts at Los Cabos in Mexico.



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EVERTON LODGES APPEAL AGAINST PENALTY

Everton has lodged an appeal against its two-point deduction for breaking financial rules, and the English Premier League wants a verdict to be reached before the last round. The relegation-threatened club was docked two points last week for overspending in a three-year spell up to the end of the 2022-23 season. It was a second deduction this season, with Everton having already had six points removed — reduced from 10 following an appeal — for breaching spending limits from 2019-20 to the 2021-22 season. Everton admitted to breaching the permitted loss threshold under the league's profit and sustainability rules by 16.6 million pounds (\$21 million) for the second offense. The independent commission which imposed the sanction disclosed in the written reasons for its decision that the Premier League initially sought a five-point penalty.

MULTIYEAR CONTRACT EXTENSION

Two-time Formula 1 champion Fernando Alonso has signed a contract extension to remain at Aston Martin for at least the next two seasons. The 42-year-old Spaniard is in his second season at Aston Martin, which announced the extension as a "multiyear" deal. "I am at my physical best and still hungry. I will give my all as we continue our journey to becoming a world championship winning team," Alonso said in the announcement. Alonso joined Aston Martin from Alpine to replace Sebastian Vettel, who retired. "We have built a strong working relationship over the last 18 months and we share the same determination to see this project succeed," Aston Martin team principal Mike Krack said. Alonso had been linked to a possible move to Mercedes.



NOVAK DJOKOVIC ECLIPSES ROGER FEDERER'S RECORD FOR OLDEST MAN RANKED NO. 1 IN TENNIS

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Novak Djokovic has surpassed another tennis record once held by Roger Federer, becoming the oldest man to be ranked No. 1 in the ATP Tour's computerized rankings...





BY STAFF WRITER

Novak Djokovic has surpassed another tennis record once held by Roger Federer, becoming the oldest man to be ranked No. 1 in the ATP Tour's computerized rankings. Djokovic is 36 — he turns 37 next month — and is now older than Federer was on his last day atop the rankings in June 2018. Monday gives Djokovic 420 total weeks at that spot, extending another mark Federer (who was there for 310 weeks) had at one time before Djokovic broke it.

Djokovic's 24 Grand Slam singles titles also are the most by a man in tennis history and the most by anyone in the Open era, which began in 1968. Federer broke Pete Sampras' men's record of 14 major championships and retired with 20, before Rafael

Nadal (now with 22) and Djokovic overtook him.

Djokovic is entered this week in the Monte Carlo Masters clay-court tournament as he prepares to defend his title at the French Open, where play begins on May 26. It will be Djokovic's first competitive action since he split from coach Goran Ivanisevic.

He has held onto No. 1 since returning there most recently last September after winning the U.S. Open.

Australian Open champion Jannik Sinner remained at No. 2 in Monday's rankings, followed by Carlos Alcaraz, Daniil Medvedev and Alexander Zverev, all in the same places as a week ago.

There was no movement in the WTA women's top five, either, with Iga Swiatek at No. 1, Aryna Sabalenka at No. 2 and Coco Gauff, Elena Rybakina and Jessica Pegula next. ■

SAUDI ARABIA WILL HOST THE WOMEN'S TENNIS WTA FINALS FOR THE NEXT THREE YEARS

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Saudi Arabia will host the WTA Finals as part of a three-year deal announced Thursday by the women's professional tennis tour that will increase the prize money for this November's...

A close-up portrait of Steve Simon, a middle-aged man with thinning grey hair and glasses, wearing a blue suit jacket over a white shirt. He is looking slightly to the right with a faint smile.

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BY STAFF WRITER

Saudi Arabia will host the WTA Finals as part of a three-year deal announced Thursday by the women's professional tennis tour that will increase the prize money for this November's season-ending championship to a record \$15.25 million, a 70% increase from 2023. The event for the top eight singles players and top eight doubles teams will be held in Riyadh from 2024-26, part of a recent wave of investment by the kingdom in tennis and various sports, despite questions about LGBTQ+ and women's rights there raised by Hall of Famers Chris Evert and Martina Navratilova and others.

"We're going into this eyes wide open that the investment in sport by Saudi certainly provokes strong views from people," WTA Tour Chairman and CEO Steve Simon told The Associated Press. "We've met with Chris and Martina and listened to their concerns and we have shared their concerns through our

stakeholders as well, without prejudice. We've also shared the concerns around women's rights and LGBTQ+ rights within the Kingdom of Saudi. Our focus is on how we develop women's tennis for the benefit of everybody involved in the game. The reality of it is ... we are truly a global tour, a global business. We have players from over 90 nations now. We have over 90 events. ... We participate in many countries that have different cultures and values systems across the board."

As for any concerns about Saudi Arabia that current players might have, Simon said: "We don't plan to do any persuading. The players need to make their own choices, and we do believe that everyone who qualifies is going to want to play."

Locations in Europe, North America and Asia also were considered as possible new sites for the WTA Finals, which have moved around to five cities over the past five editions after a deal to put the tournament in Shenzhen, China, through 2030 was disrupted by the coronavirus pandemic and concerns over the safety of



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retired Grand Slam doubles champion Peng Shuai, who accused a Chinese government official of rape.

The cities that hosted in 2022 (Fort Worth, Texas) and 2023 (Cancun, Mexico) were not revealed until September each year, and last November's event was strongly criticized by players. Four-time Grand Slam champion Iga Swiatek beat Jessica Pegula in last year's title match; U.S. Open champ Coco Gauff and Australian Open winner Aryna Sabalenka were among the other participants.

Simon said Riyadh was selected by the WTA in late December, but the details of the agreement were just completed.

"This partnership will build on our exposure to a market and a region whose impact on the sports industry is certainly growing rapidly," Simon said. "We certainly expect that you'll see more events coming there in the future. So at the end, we believe that the

WTA should be a part of this development, versus being on the outside."

Saudi Arabia's Private Investment Fund (PIF) formed the LIV Golf tour and put money into soccer, for example, and the kingdom's role in tennis has been rising. The ATP Tour moved its Next Gen Finals for leading 21-and-under players to Jeddah in November; the PIF is the title sponsor for the men's rankings; 22-time Grand Slam champion Rafael Nadal recently became an ambassador for the Saudi Tennis Federation; he will join 24-time major champ Novak Djokovic and rising stars Carlos Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner at an exhibition event in Riyadh in October. There have been discussions about placing a top-tier Masters 1000 tournament in Saudi Arabia, too, part of a possible larger restructuring involving the WTA, ATP and the country.

Rights groups say women continue to face discrimination in most aspects of family life and



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homosexuality is a major taboo, as it is in much of the rest of the Middle East.

In recent years, Saudi Arabia has enacted wide-ranging social reforms, including granting women the right to drive and largely dismantling male guardianship laws that had allowed husbands and male relatives to control many aspects of women's lives. Men and women are still required to dress modestly, but the rules have been loosened and the once-feared religious police have been sidelined. Still, same-sex relations are punishable by death or flogging, though prosecutions are rare.

In an opinion piece published in The Washington Post in January, Evert and Navratilova urged the WTA to stay out of Saudi Arabia because, they wrote, staging the Finals there "would represent not progress, but significant regression" and asked whether "staging a Saudi crown-jewel tournament would involve players in an act of sportswashing merely for the sake of a cash influx."

In response, Saudi Arabia's ambassador to the United States, Princess Reema bint Bandar Al Saud, said the two former athletes relied on "outdated stereotypes and western-centric views of our culture" and "turned their back on the very same women they have inspired and it is beyond disappointing."

The ambassador joined the head of the Saudi Tennis Federation and other women in a video conference with current WTA athletes to "speak to the changes that are happening and to what still needs to be done within the region," Simon said.

The WTA said the Finals prize money will help work to meet the tour's pledge, made last year, to increase pay and put it in line with what men earn in tennis. The \$15.25 million on offer from Nov. 2-9, 2024 — an amount set to increase in 2025 and 2026 — is up from last year's \$9 million and eclipses the event-high \$14 million at Shenzhen in 2019. ■

KORDA WINS 4th STRAIGHT LPGA TOUR START, BEATING MAGUIRE IN T-MOBILE MATCH PLAY

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Nelly Korda is on a roll not seen on the LPGA Tour in 16 years. She won four of the first seven holes, largely making the rest of the final in the T-Mobile Match Play a formality in beating Leona Maguire 4 and 3 at Shadow Creek...

BY STAFF WRITER

Nelly Korda is on a roll not seen on the LPGA Tour in 16 years. She won four of the first seven holes, largely making the rest of the final in the T-Mobile Match Play a formality in beating Leona Maguire 4 and 3 at Shadow Creek.

Lorena Ochoa in 2008 was the last player to win four consecutive starts. Korda, the world's top-ranked player, will try to tie the record of five — set by Nancy Lopez in 1978 and matched by Annika Sorenstam in 2004-05 — in two weeks at the season's first major, The Chevron Championship outside Houston.

Because Korda took seven weeks off after winning in January in her hometown of Bradenton, Florida, this victory was her third straight in a scheduled event. Four players share the record of four in a row, with Mickey Wright doing it twice. Korda also became the first American since Kathy Whitworth in 1969 to win four of her first five starts in a season.

"I can't even wrap my head around it," Korda said "Such a whirlwind of the last three weeks. I just feel like I was just in go-mode constantly."

This was the first head-to-head match-play singles event between Korda and Maguire, but they have experience against each other in similar settings at the Solheim Cup. The Irish player is 3-1 while representing Europe in team match-play events against Korda. Korda birdied Nos. 5-7 for a 4-up lead. She was 5 up after 12, saw Maguire take 13 and 14 with pars, and ended the match with a par win on the par-4 15th.

"It's always nice to get a lead, kind of like a cushion," Korda said. "But it's Leona. She's such a fiery competitor. I knew when I lost those two holes in a row, 13 and 14, that I really needed to put my foot

down to finish the match off."

Korda earned \$300,000 for her 12th career victory.

"You know you're going to have to make birdies if you want to beat her," Maguire said. "Unfortunately, I didn't make enough today. Hats off to her. She is an incredible player and she is playing some great golf right now. All I could do is play my own game, and that wasn't good enough today."

This tournament was entirely match play the first three years and played in late May when temperatures often are in the high 90s. Many of the top players opted not to compete. The format changed this year to three days of stroke play, with the top eight advancing to match play on the weekend. The event also moved back to early April, when temperatures are much more moderate, which helped attract its strongest field. It's a field that Maguire dominated during stroke play, ending the first three rounds at 6-under par, three strokes better than anyone else.

"It almost felt like two separate tournaments this week, the stroke-play event and the match-play event," Maguire said. "To lead the stroke play around this golf course by three at the end of the three days was something I

can take a lot of positives from and be very proud of."

Korda had to fight just to get into the match play. She shot 73 each of the first two rounds, but then came through with a 69 on Wednesday to advance to the weekend. Then she didn't let the opportunity go to waste at one of the more demanding courses on the tour.

"It's absolutely breathtaking, such an amazing, amazing golf course," Korda said. "It is brutal, though. It has tested every part of my game. I think golf courses like that are so much fun play. They're so frustrating where you're just like you walk off the hole and you're just so frustrated there are a couple swear words going through your head." ■



FEATURE

TIGER WOODS HAS NOT GIVEN UP HOPE OF ADDING ANOTHER MASTERS GREEN JACKET

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Tiger Woods still thinks he can win another Masters. Recent evidence would suggest that might be a steeper climb than walking up to the 18th green at Augusta National. Never mind he is 48 and has had more surgeries than his 15 major titles...



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BY STAFF WRITER

Tiger Woods still thinks he can win another Masters. Recent evidence would suggest that might be a steeper climb than walking up to the 18th green at Augusta National. Never mind he is 48 and has had more surgeries than his 15 major titles. Or that in his 10 rounds at the Masters since he won in 2019, he has broken par — and not by much — only three times. Or that his body has allowed him to play only 24 holes of tournament golf this year.

Woods was asked what he was capable of doing against Scottie Scheffler and defending champion Jon

Rahm, against a field that brings together the best from the PGA Tour and LIV Golf for the first time since July.

“If everything comes together, I think I can get one more,” Woods said. He paused briefly before adding, “Do I need to describe that any more than that, or are we good?”

The answer will start to reveal itself Thursday. As always, there is much curiosity about the one player who once was as predictable as golf allows. There is a practical side to Woods. He knows the limitations of age and injury because he said he feels it just about every day.

“Some days, I just feel really good,” he said. “Other



days, not so much.”

That’s a product of knee surgeries, a fused lower back, a fused ankle. He is not limping as much, like last year when he wound up withdrawing before he could finish the rain-delayed third round at the Masters.

But his hope going into 2024 was to play once a month. That seemed to be a reasonable plan until he skipped all of the Florida swing in March.

“**My** body wasn’t ready,” he said. “My game wasn’t ready.”

Woods said he doesn’t practice nearly as much as he once did, even with his own short-game course in the backyard of his Florida home. His future has been so clouded that even his private jet being spotted on its way to Augusta a few weeks ago became news. To him, the Masters is another chance to compete on his favorite course at his favorite major. That still matters.

For as long as he has played, as often as he has won, with so many trophies he doesn’t know where most of them are, it doesn’t get old.

“**I** love golf. I do,” he said with a warm smile. “I’ve always loved it. I played other sports growing up, but I just have always loved this sport. I love to compete. And to be able to have the love I have for the game and the love for competition be intertwined, I think that’s one of the reasons why I’ve had a successful career.”

He took a few clubs with him on the front nine when he arrived Sunday, then played the back nine with Will Zalatoris on Monday and the front nine with Fred Couples and Justin Thomas on Tuesday. They all had wonderful reviews of Woods and how he is swinging. That’s become its own tradition at every major over the last few years. He does just enough, even now, to make people wonder if there’s one more left in him.

At stake for Woods is to make the cut at the Masters



for the 24th consecutive time, which would break the record he shares with Couples and Gary Player.

"I think the last thing he's thinking about is making the cut," Couples said. "Can he win here? You know what? Yeah. I just watched him play nine holes, and nine holes is only nine holes on a Tuesday, but he never mishit a shot. But the idea of making a cut ... that's a huge record, but he's here to win. He's here to play really, really hard."

A warm, overcast day kept the conditions firm and the biggest anticipation is how much a day of rain in the forecast later in the week will take away from a fast golf course. Tuesday typically is the busiest day for practice, with an abbreviated schedule on Wednesday ahead of the Par 3 Tournament.

Scheffler is the favorite, with odds better than they have been for anyone since Woods. Rory McIlroy has been a curious case, not arriving until Tuesday (he

came to Augusta a week ago for two days) and agreeing to a news conference only if it was kept to 10 minutes.

"I guess just trying to bring a little bit of normalcy into what I sort of try to do week in, week out," McIlroy said. "I play 25 weeks a year, and there's no point in doing anything different this week compared to other weeks."

There is little normal about Woods these days, not after all he's been through on and off the golf course, particularly the injuries that have limited his practice and his tournaments.

That he still believes he can win is normal. He always says that. But there will come a time when his best isn't good enough — Woods was talking about that when he was still in his late 20s and at the peak of his game.

"I don't know when that day is, when that day comes," Woods said. "But I still think that I can. I haven't got to that point where I don't think I can't." ■

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